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Technical cooperation

Some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics

Note by the Secretariat

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission a report on some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics, which is contained in the annex. The report was a result of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics, held at Voorburg, the Netherlands, from 8 to 10 September 1997.

2. The report has also benefited from comments by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (New York, 10–12 February 1997), as well as various national statistical offices and regional statistical committees. It is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission's Working Group (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 31).

3. Additional comments on the report, if any, will be brought to the attention of the Commission orally during the thirtieth session.

* E/CN.3/1999/1.

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Annex

Some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics

I. Introduction

1. At its twenty-ninth session (New York, 11 to 14 February 1997), the Statistical Commission decided that the topic of technical cooperation should be discussed in detail in separate meetings. Accordingly, in April and September 1997, Statistics Netherlands convened two meetings of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics at Voorburg, the Netherlands, at which a number of papers and contributions were considered. On the basis of those papers and the discussions held, a detailed report was prepared together with the present summary document, which were considered by the regional commissions in 1997–1998. The present summary has been amended to take account of comments, and is submitted to the Statistical Commission for further discussion with a view to agreeing guiding principles for technical cooperation in statistics.

2. Technical cooperation for statistics comprises the exchange and development of know-how and technical expertise in order to build capacities to produce and use statistics. The scope of technical cooperation activities is wide, ranging from informal contacts in international working groups and meetings to in-depth programmes to improve statistics. To be successful, it needs to be undertaken as a partnership between the various involved organizations, who should share common goals.

3. The guiding principles (or recommendations) set out below are based on the broad consensus reached by the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics and subsequent consultations. They contain a number of recommendations for improving technical cooperation within a partnership, but the set does not pretend to be exhaustive on this point. An appendix provides checklists for more detailed consideration.

4. The guiding principles should help partners in the technical cooperation process to create models following the best possible practices of technical cooperation. They also aim to encourage countries to make optimal use of statistics and commit themselves to improving the national statistical system, such as by guaranteeing the availability of adequate staff, equipment, management and other resources and by allowing professional independence.

II. Good practice for technical cooperation

5. The following are suggested criteria for good practice. Technical cooperation should:

(a) Be demand-led, based on assessments of user requirements and relative priorities, including national, regional and international needs;

(b) Be set within a well balanced overall strategic framework and work programme for national statistical development;

(c) Consider human and other resource development strategies, and organizational and institutional development needs, as well as technical work areas;

(d) Be flexible and take account of local situations, culture, language, policy environments and stage of statistical development;

(e) Ensure both government and donor commitment and complement national resources, while empowering recipient national statistical systems and Governments to take the lead;

(f) Address the needs of regional groupings of countries where a common approach can be effective, while recognizing that the heterogeneity of countries means that they have many different needs and priorities, even when producing similar outputs. Regional technical cooperation programmes might support cooperation *between* and/or *within* regional groupings;

(g) Be well designed, for instance by using logical framework approaches, including specifying objectives and success criteria in advance, and considering wider issues beyond the immediate scope of an individual project;

(h) Promote full participation and address the concerns of all main stakeholders;

(i) Be implemented according to professional standards using the most appropriate model of cooperation (that is, single or multiple donors working with single countries or regional groups, either independently or in joint ventures);

(j) Be implemented using a structured approach, possibly with reference to some form of conceptual framework;

(k) Integrate staff training in a way that optimizes its effect on objectives of the project;

(l) Use appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to facilitate effective project implementation, exchange of experience and lesson learning;

(m) Be coordinated between donors and between different players in the national statistical system in a proactive way to avoid duplication of effort and encourage complementarity and synergy;

(n) Recognize that developing a statistical system can take a long time.

III. General policy considerations

6. The following general policy considerations are relevant to the consideration of technical cooperation for statistics:

(a) It is the task of the national statistical system to make available to government, the public and the private sector relevant and reliable statistical information for economic, social, cultural and environmental developments in a country;

(b) A more precise formulation of the type, frequency and coverage of information to be produced should result from a balanced dialogue between users and producers;

(c) Both producers and users of statistical information should play an active role in the formulation of the statistical work programme;

(d) The partners in technical cooperation need to be committed to the programmes and processes being developed;

(e) The importance of national statistics needs to be recognized by national authorities, such as by supporting:

(i) A workable legal and institutional setting;

(ii) Adequate and motivated staff;

(iii) Basic accommodation, software and equipment;

(iv) A commitment to good management practices;

(v) Awareness of the fundamental principles of official statistics.

IV. Goals and success criteria for technical cooperation

7. Different partners involved in technical cooperation typically have different goals and therefore different criteria for judging the success of technical cooperation. However, the design of technical cooperation projects should involve all main stakeholders, and should identify common, possibly multiple goals. Success can be measured in terms of progress towards these wider goals, as well as by the achievement of intermediate goals and more specific targets.

8. The following main goals have been identified:

(a) Increased and *better use of better statistics* in key areas in order to provide the basis for policy, planning, decision-making and the monitoring of social, economic and environmental development and investment decisions;

(b) *Increased statistical capacity and capabilities* to produce statistics in priority areas, and the production of such statistics;

(c) The *ability to sustain and develop* systems and capabilities in the longer term.

V. Checklists of specific measures or issues to be considered in the design and implementation of technical cooperation programmes

9. The Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics discussed various issues related to the design and implementation of cooperation programmes. These included mechanisms for identifying and prioritizing user needs and strategic approaches for the development and delivery of work programmes, key aspects of project design, cooperation models and conceptual frameworks, and factors that influence implementation. Checklists on these issues are contained in the appendix.

VI. Monitoring and evaluation

10. The purpose of monitoring is to *check on progress during implementation* in order to identify any problems and adjust the project accordingly. It also assesses project progress towards the intermediate and final objectives, and provides an opportunity for dialogue.

11. *Evaluation at the end of a project* should aid lesson learning and exchange of experience between projects and countries. It can consider project *impact* (for instance, in relation to use of statistics), *outputs* achieved (relevance, quality, accessibility) and/or *inputs* (efficiency and effectiveness), and *sustainability* (of systems put in place and capabilities developed).

12. The scale of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be appropriate to the size, duration and nature of the project.

13. Evaluations are normally best carried out by independent but knowledgeable experts.

14. Monitoring during project implementation is normally conducted through self-assessment by project partners.

VII. Coordination

15. Coordination is needed to avoid conflicting projects, to seek synergy and to create optimal conditions for working together in partnerships, and is best achieved by:

(a) The recipient national statistical system playing the key role in the coordination process;

(b) Making explicit which objectives, values and methods are shared by the partners involved;

(c) Establishing the exchange and sharing of information among the relevant partners;

(d) Coordinating the work of regional or subject matter working groups to ensure the exchange of information;

(e) Extending the exchange of information within national statistical services to all relevant organizations, including the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance;

(f) Making coordination proactive to promote the design of joint or complementary projects and activities involving different partners.

Appendix

Checklists of specific measures or issues to be considered in the design and implementation of technical cooperation programmes

A. Design issues

1. A suggested checklist of specific measures or issues to be considered is set out below.

User needs and priorities

1. Identify needs of key users and determine priorities.
2. Establish mechanisms to decide between priorities and resolve conflicts.
3. Ensure that international needs and the advantages of harmonized statistical outputs do not override national needs.
4. Establish constructive dialogue with users and organizations funding statistical programmes; user-producer and/or statistical advisory committees can assist in such processes.

Statistical work programme and resource needs

5. Establish statistical work programmes and strategies to guide the allocation of resources.
6. Define outputs, activities, inputs and resource gaps.

Strategies for delivery of work programmes

7. Formulate human resource development strategies.
8. Formulate information systems and dissemination strategies.
9. Consider legal status and formulate organizational and communication strategies.

Logical framework approach

10. Link inputs to the associated activities that deliver the outputs and the immediate and final objectives of technical cooperation.
11. Establish indicators of success and monitoring mechanisms at the outset, together with an assessment of external factors affecting a project, especially the risk factors that could prevent the project from meeting its objectives.
12. Ensure that the means of monitoring and evaluation are agreed jointly by the main stakeholders.

Role of technical cooperation

13. Ensure that technical cooperation complements national resources and commitments.
14. Ensure that it is time-bound, with realistic "exit" strategies.
15. Ensure that it supports national statistical development plans and associated strategies.
16. Ensure that it is led and coordinated by recipient/partner national statistical institutions and Governments.
17. Bear in mind that the role of technical experts is to advise and assist, and to share skills, information and experience with partners.

B. Cooperation models and conceptual frameworks for implementation

2. Different kinds of cooperation models should be examined to select the most appropriate model; for example, models could be based on the needs of:

(a) A single country with one or more donors, working either independently or in joint ventures;

(b) A group of countries (regional approach) with one or more donor/provider partner(s), working either independently or in joint ventures;

(c) Any combination of recipient countries and/or groups of countries with one or more donors, working either independently or in joint ventures.

3. Conceptual frameworks can be designed by using several dimensions, with which a series of matrices or cubes can be constructed. In this approach, each matrix represents a certain part of the statistical system. For instance, using a three-dimensional approach:

(a) One dimension can represent the different statistical surveys that are related to a specific field, such as enterprise statistics;

(b) A second dimension can be formed by the detailed structure of the statistical production process that is relevant for that specific field. The structure can present different options for methodological structure of the statistical production process that is relevant for that specific field. The structure can present different options for methodological solutions;

(c) These kinds of matrices can be constructed for the fields of automation, general business register, social statistics, enterprise statistics, national accounts and policy matters;

(d) Each cell or a number of cells of these matrices can refer to the possible content of one or more actions in the field of technical cooperation;

(e) The third dimension that can be added to these matrices is the number of countries that participate in a regional project. It shows which kinds of action, on the basis of their content, can be useful for several countries.

C. Checklist of factors that influence the implementation process

4. A checklist of factors that influence the implementation process is set out below.

Factors affecting absorption capacity

1. Draft a contract to formalize the intended inputs by all partners in the technical cooperation process;
2. Adopt a flexible approach in order to adapt to changing circumstances;
3. Draft intermediate outputs to provide relevant project documentation;
4. Develop and use supporting tools and disseminate them throughout the organization;
5. Give continued attention to the user-producer dialogue;
6. Make internal coordination a priority in order to stimulate the involvement of the rest of the organization;
7. Create internal working groups to support the process of internal coordination;
8. Give constant attention to institutional and organizational developments that support the sustainability of project achievements.

Factors that affect inputs by the various partners

9. Make institutional responsibility for technical cooperation a part of the contract so as to strengthen the professional basis for the partnership in technical cooperation.

10. Ensure long-term commitment when donors need to be deeply involved.

11. Ensure adequate quality of staff.

12. Ensure flexibility from the input side.

13. Avoid hierarchical communications.

14. Make empathy and understanding culture a priority in view of the need for acceptability.

15. Bear in mind that speaking the language and a positive atmosphere make communication much easier.

16. Ensure that the delivery of inputs meets the timetable for the process.

17. Support professionalism by providing clear project management without an excess of managers.

18. Ensure adequate training programmes that target correct staff and focus on short practical training, where appropriate.

19. Use regional approaches, either to exchange information between recipients or as a form of cooperation, in a responsible way.

20. Use e-mail and other communication tools to speed up the communication process.

Agreement of partners on taxonomy of projects

21. Ensure that partners agree on the characteristics of the project, including size, duration, location(s), financial characteristics, subject, scope, organization and expected results.

22. Ensure that partners agree on the people involved and their status; their familiarity with the culture of the country/organization and language; their level of expertise (specialist or generalist); long-term or short-term status; the kind of equipment and manuals that will be used; and the role of training (advice can be given in a diagnostic way as evaluations or audits).